



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Changing landscapes, changing structures:

DSS approach to policy advice and evaluation

Overview

- DSS approach to policy advice
- Elements of the DSS centralised approach to evaluation
- Drivers of change
- Our vision for the future – 2020



DSS approach to policy advice

Department of Social Services: Vision and mission

Vision: To be Australia's pre-eminent social policy agency

Our mission is to:
Improve the lifetime wellbeing
of people and families in
Australia



DSS approach to policy advice: Policy Frame

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES APPROACH TO POLICY ADVICE

This document represents a statement to ministers, other agencies and external stakeholders on the department's approach to developing its policy advice. It is intended to set a high benchmark for the quality of the department's policy advice. The document provides a consistent, rigorous and systematic approach to advising government action.

	Domain	Commitment
Our role	Policy development	We recognise our role in ensuring the long-term integrity of policy development within our areas of responsibility.
	Evidence-based and whole of department	Our advice reflects a thorough understanding of the issues and evidence, and carefully considers the views of experts, stakeholders and other agencies. We are forward-looking and provide considered advice on future issues, opportunities and challenges. We explain and test assumptions that underpin our policy advice and carefully explain our reasoning where a view is not backed by robust evidence. We consult internally and work hard to develop and promulgate a robust departmental view.
	Improving lifetime wellbeing	Our policy advice is focussed on improving the lifetime wellbeing of people and families, within a frame of encouraging independence and economic and social participation. We understand that people's needs and circumstances change across their lives and are influenced by the broader social and economic context. We give policy priority to those people and families who are most likely to have poor lifetime outcomes. We understand the role that education, employment and well-functioning families play in promoting lifetime wellbeing, and that acting early can prevent poor lifetime outcomes. We recognise the role that community behaviours, civil society and economic opportunity play in promoting lifetime wellbeing. Our focus on lifetime wellbeing recognises the importance of ensuring sustainable economic growth.
Our focus	National significance	Our advice focuses on issues of national significance. These are issues of national concern. Our advice recognises the roles of the states, territories, local governments and the private sector. Our advice recognises that governments have a role to play in creating a better future for all.
	Action is connected and practical	Our advice considers all relevant mechanisms to address an issue, not just those administered by our department. We recognise that sometimes the best solution will be the responsibility of others. We design solutions that connect to, and utilise, the policies and services of other agencies, levels of government, civil society and the private sector. Our advice carefully considers cost, implementation and timing issues, recommends a course of action and includes practical, achievable plans.
Proposing action	Success and failure	We define success in terms of achieving expected improvements in lifetime wellbeing and encouraging greater independence for individuals and families. Our advice recognises that social policy outcomes can take time to deliver and can be difficult to measure. We propose well-considered strategies for evaluation, including interim and proxy measures of progress. We provide honest advice on when and why a policy should be changed or terminated. Such advice might be needed, for example, when policy is: not achieving its intended effect; not cost-effective; or no longer appropriate for the prevailing social or economic circumstances.

...issues of national significance...

...understanding of the issues and evidence...

...likely impact of government action or inaction...

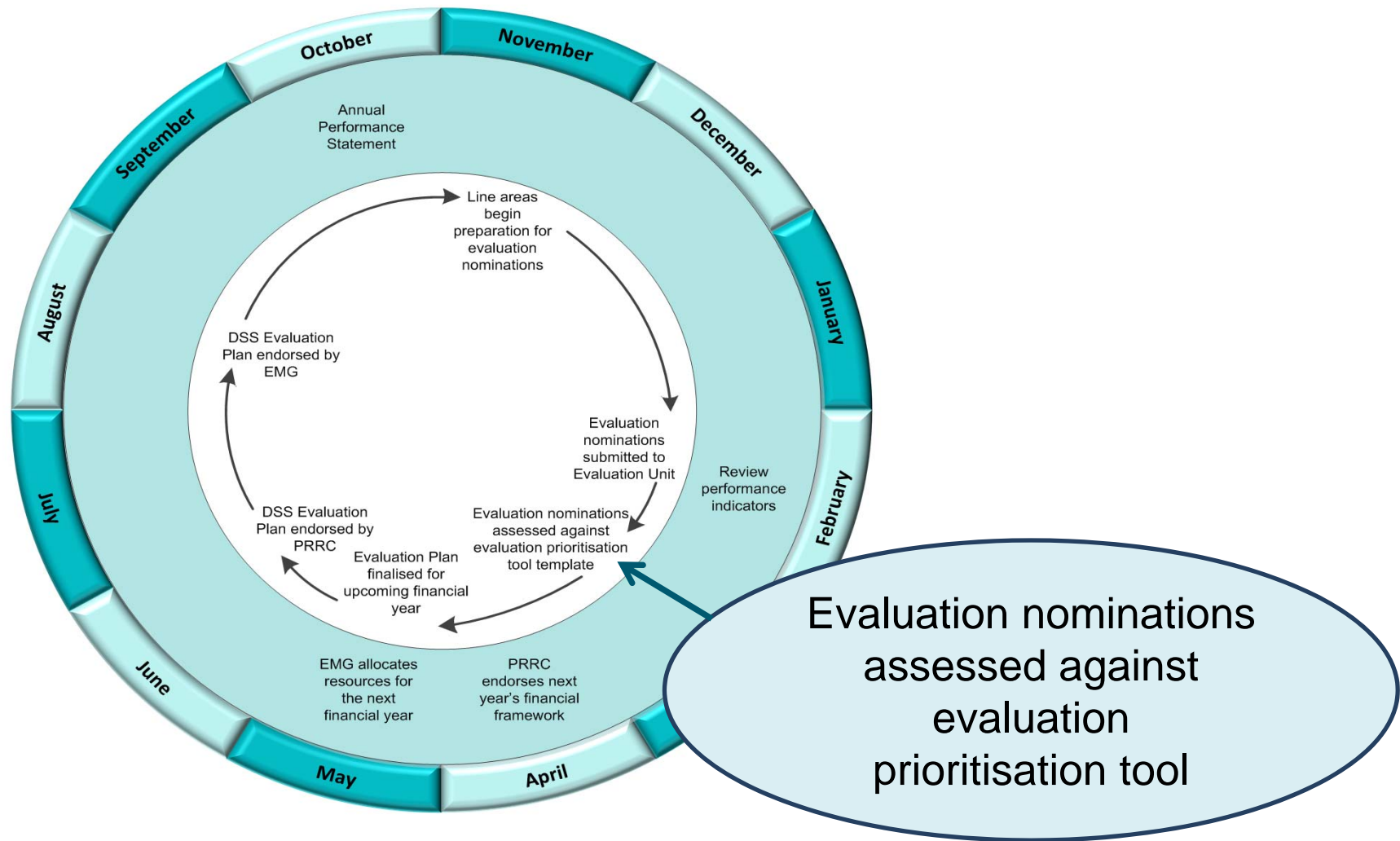
...policy outcomes can take time to deliver...well-considered strategies for evaluation...

12 December 2013

DSS Wellbeing Planning Frame



Four year DSS Evaluation Plan





Elements of the DSS centralised approach to evaluation

Key elements of the DSS centralised approach

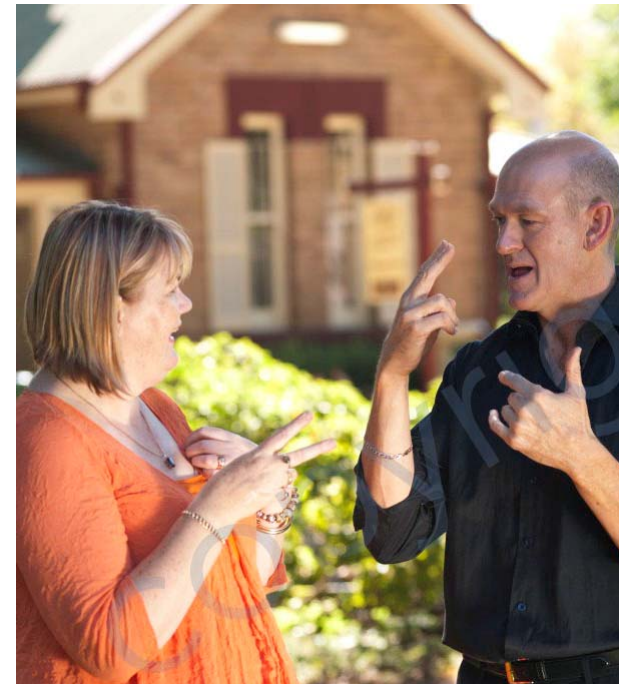
- Centralised Evaluation Unit located in the Policy Office
- Governance arrangements for evaluation
- Ongoing funding for Evaluation Unit
- Impact Evaluations are conducted by centralised Evaluation Unit
- Policy/program areas conduct:
 - Post implementation reviews (process evaluations)
 - Program performance reviews (ongoing monitoring)

DSS Evaluation Framework

- High level, outcomes-focused approach to evaluation
- Standard processes, roles, responsibilities and structures
- Promotes evaluation readiness
- Principles for conducting all DSS impact evaluations

Centralised Evaluation Unit focuses on impacts

- Did the policy/program deliver intended outcomes in short, medium & long term, for whom, in what ways & in what circumstances?
- What unintended outcomes (positive or negative) occurred?
- To what extent can changes be attributed to the policy/program?
- What particular features of the policy/program made a difference, or had most impact?
- What was the influence of other factors?



Benefits of centralisation

- Location in Policy Office
 - enables us to readily access relevant internal networks
- Increased independence / more distance from programs
 - though no evaluator is completely objective (Conley-Tyler, 2005)
- Greater policy/program accountability (Rogers et al, 2015)
- Harnesses technical expertise in a central area – this facilitates efforts to build evaluation capability across DSS
- Stronger quality assurance of impact evaluations (Laubli Loud, 2016)

Challenges of centralisation

- Evaluation Unit needs to develop a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the policy measure to be evaluated
- Cultural change takes time; it can take time to build evaluation readiness (NSW Government Evaluation Framework 2013; Stewart, 2014)
- Multi-year planning at the organisational level is challenging (Porteous & Montague, 2014)
- Still need evaluation capability in line areas to achieve quality input, as well as strategies to improve ownership by line areas, while still promoting the independence of the evaluation (Laubli Loud, 2016)



Drivers of change

“After you've done a thing the same way for two years, look it over carefully. After five years, look at it with suspicion. And after ten years, throw it away and start all over.”

Alfred Perlman (1902-1983)

Drivers of change

- *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), including enhanced Cth performance framework
- Policy focus on assessing impact of DSS activities on lifetime wellbeing
- Strengthening in-house data and data governance (PM&C, 2015)
- Whole-of-Government innovation agenda
- Data Exchange (DEX)
- Community Grants Hub: evaluation as a critical element of grant design



Our vision for the future – 2020

“The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes
but in having new eyes.” **Marcel Proust (1871-1922)**

Our vision for the future - 2020

- Strong evaluation culture, all major policies/programs are evaluation ready
- Shift to more holistic, cross-cutting evaluations
- Evaluation capability has broadened to include in-house data and system analysis capability
- Co-designed evaluation frameworks
- More innovative approaches to evaluation, for example:
 - greater application of behavioural insights
 - use of Randomised Control Trials as an evaluation methodology

Thank you

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